THE MINISTER OF YOUTH AFFAIRS, SPORTS AND MINES (SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH DHINDSA): (a) to (e) As per the information furnished by the Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM), a subordinate office of the Ministry of Mines, no mining lease has been granted for slate as a major mineral in Himachal Pradesh. Slate is also reckoned as a minor mineral when used as building stone under Section 3(e) of the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957. Mineral concessions for slate as a minor mineral in the State of Himachal Pradesh are being granted under Himachal Pradesh Minor Minerals (Concession) Revised Rules, 1971. As per the information furnished by the State Government of Himachal Pradesh, there are 468 number of Slate mines functioning at present in the State but 430 working pits of Slate mines were closed in the last five years resulting in loss of employment to about 4200 mine labourers. These pits were closed down due to the enforcement of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The State Government of Himachal Pradesh has further stated that in order to provide jobs to persons rendered unemployed an area of 25 hectares in Khanyara (forest land) has been identified where safe and scientific mining can be carried out provided the necessary clearance for diversion of forest land is granted by the Ministry of Environment & Forests.

Demand for Indian granite in international market

2897. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether demand for Indian granite has declined in the international market;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) the countries to which granite is being exported at present;

(d) whether Government propose to explore the possibility of export of granite to the South East African countries where Indian granite was in great demand; and

(e) what is the position of Indian granite in Taiwan and Japan at present?

THE MINISTER OF YOUTH AFFAIRS, SPORTS AND MINES (SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH DHINDSA): (a) to (b) As per export performance, International demand for Indian granite has generally shown a mixed trend. However, as per Industry estimate, demand for Indian granite has shown some revival during the last two years (1998-99 to 1999-2000).

(c) The principal importers of Indian granite are USA, Italy, Peoples Republic of China, Chinese Taipei, Germany, Japan and Belgium.

(d) The Export - Import policy of the Government lays down the background for promotion of exports including that for granite, and the granite industry explores the possibilities of finding new markets overseas.

(e) Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) and Japan are two important buyers of Indian Granite, however as per industry reports, slump in construction industry in these countries have affected export of Indian granite to these countries. Export of Indian granite to Taiwan and Japan during 1997-98 and 1998-99 is as under:

(Quantity in Tonnes)				(Value in Rs. 000)
Country	1997-98		1998-99	
	Qty.	Value	Qty.	Value
Chinese Taipei	95,845	10,15,034	105,148	8,01,047
Japan	45,705	8,79,760	33,430	6,55,672

Book stall contract of M/s. A. H. Wheeler & Co.

2898. SHRI GOPALSINH G. SOLANKI:
PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 4390, given in the Rajya Sabha on 5th May, 2000 and state:

(a) the details of the past background of the bookstall contract of M/s. A.H. Wheeler & Co. in the context of renewal of the bookstall agreements;

(b) whether the action taken under letter No. 66/TG.II/461 dated 4th February, 1967 regarding tenure period of all the bookstall agreements was in conformity with the provision of Article 19 (1) G of Constitution of India.;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) Prior to 1966, M/s. A.H. Wheeler & Co. had a monopoly in operating bookstalls on entire railway except Southern Railway and part of South Central Railway. The position was reviewed in 1966 and as a consequence of negotiations held with the firm in consultation with the Ministry